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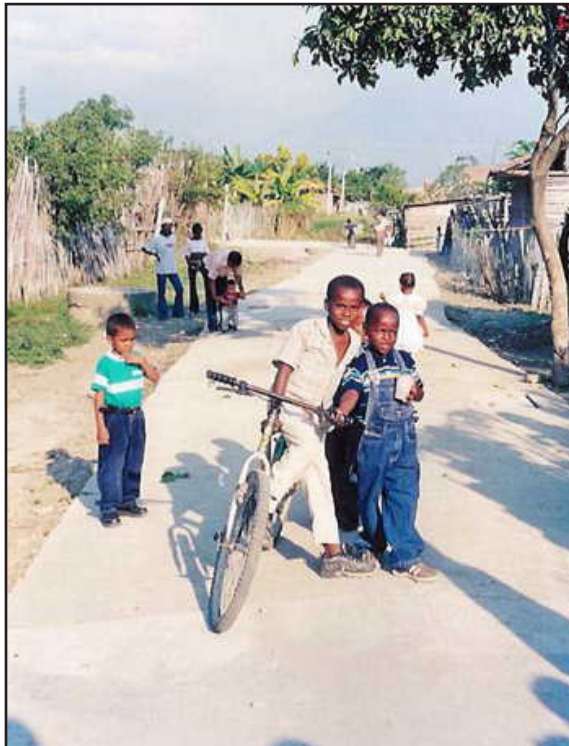
CASE STUDY

Afro-Colombians Seek Solidarity and Political Representation

"One of the main challenges is to achieve a unified cause that all Afro-Colombians understand. We must assume a positive attitude and unite our efforts. We must strengthen our participation in local governance so we can achieve political power."

Apolinar Salcedo Caicedo
Mayor of Cali

President of AMUNAFRO



Children Play Above a Covered Drainage System, Padilla, Cauca.

Photo: ARD, Inc.

Challenge

Poverty, violence, displacement, illiteracy, and political/institutional under-representation challenge Colombia's 12 million Afro-Colombians, (roughly 26% of the population). Afro-Colombians are among the most marginalized and discriminated population in the country.

Seventy six (76%) percent of Afro-Colombians live in poverty, with per-capita incomes only one-third the national average. Among the rural population, 43% are illiterate; among urban dwellers, 20% are illiterate. Most Afro-Colombians live in rural areas along the Pacific and Atlantic coasts of Colombia, although significant numbers live in large urban centers.

Afro-Colombians suffer disproportionately from violence and displacement related to armed conflict, and narco-trafficking. Historically, many Afro-Colombians felt that they were excluded from mainstream Colombian society, primarily due to political under-representation.

Initiatives and Results

Since 2000, USAID/Colombia has worked extensively to include Afro-Colombians across the range of our programs. USAID's Democratic Local Governance Program (DLGP), implemented by ARD, Inc., actively supports Afro-Colombians, primarily in Nariño, Cauca and Antioquia, (western Colombia).

More than 65,000 Afro-Colombians, in 61 different municipalities, participated in and/or benefited from technical assistance, training and infrastructure projects carried out through the Democratic Local Governance Program.

The Program includes initiatives to:

- **Strengthen Citizen Participation**
- **Improve Municipal Management**
- **Expand Social Infrastructure**
- **Promote Accountability/transparency In Governance.**

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Plenary Session, First Afro-Colombian Institutional Strengthening Conference, Cali, 2003



"The challenge of the Afro-Colombian population is to achieve the union of the Afro-Colombian organizations and to work for their institutional strengthening ... also to increase the awareness on Afro-Colombian issues. The Afro-Colombian Strengthening Conference and AMUNAFRO have contributed to that."

Aura Dalia Caicedo Valencia
Coordinator, Afro-Colombian Women's Network

Institutional strengthening initiatives for Afro-Colombian organizations area also a priority under the Program.

Afro-Colombian Institutional Strengthening Conference

In August 2003, with support from USAID/Colombia, more than 500 Afro-Colombian leaders met in the first-ever Afro-Colombian Institutional Strengthening Conference. Attendees included elected and appointed officials, and local community leaders.

The primary topic discussed was how to strengthen Afro-Colombian institutions at all levels of government. President Alvaro Uribe ministers participated, lending validity to the proceedings. Successive Conferences were held in 2004 and 2005.

These conferences increased awareness and visibility for Afro-Colombian issues, nationally and internationally. They also led to agreements defining the principle challenges facing Afro-Colombians.

Conference Results Include:

- Creation of the National Association of Mayors of Municipalities of Afro-Descendant (AMUNAFRO).
- Creation of the first national public policy document (CONPES) on the status of Afro-Colombians.
- Reform of National Census methodologies to ensure an accurate count of the Afro-Colombian population in the 2005 census.
- Establishment of cooperative alliances between Afro-Colombian leaders and the Black Caucus of the U.S Congress, and the Association of Afro-American Mayors.
- Design of a health-care model for the Afro-Colombian population with the support of the Pan-American Health Organization.
- Formation of an Afro-Colombian Youth Network.

Social Infrastructure Projects (SIF)

Since 2002, approximately 60,000 Afro-Colombians benefited from 89 social infrastructure projects in eight departments (or states).

These projects resulted in improvements to:

- Schools
- Hospitals
- Roads

Grass-roots community organizations implemented these projects using a participatory methodology. USAID/Colombia funded 60% of project costs.

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Cover of a brochure produced and distributed by AMUNAFRO to promote an accurate count of Afro-Colombians in the 2005 census.

"One of the main challenges is to achieve a unified cause that all Afro-Colombians understand. We need to stop being resentful, stop complaining about discrimination, and segregation of which we are partially to blame. We must assume a positive attitude and unite our efforts, we must strengthen our participation in local governance so we can achieve political power. If we vote for our own candidates, for good people, not for personal agendas, we will gain national representation.

Therefore, I believe it is important to achieve effective participation of Afro-Colombians through local, regional and national democratic political processes."

*Apolinar Salcedo Caicedo
Mayor of Cali
President of AMUNAFRO*

Participating municipalities (analogous to US counties), and local beneficiary communities funded the remainder. Projects increased citizen participation and created direct linkages between local governments and Afro-Colombian communities through newly energized linkages between government officials and participating citizen-led committees.

Institutional Strengthening Initiatives through Grants and Technical Assistance

- 700 Afro-Colombians from Cauca and Nariño were trained in land use, citizen participation, strategic planning, and legislation on Afro-Colombian issues such as land titling, ethno-development, and environmental management of their collective lands.
- The Democratic Local Government Program assisted community leaders to organize and legalize Inter-Andean community councils to increase Afro-Colombian participation in local governance.
- The Democratic Local Government Program strengthened AMUNAFRO's promotion and implementation of important public policy initiatives to benefit Afro-Colombian populations.

Conclusion

Afro-Colombian representation at all levels of government improved dramatically since 2000, due to the Democratic Local Governance Program funded by USAID/Colombia, and implemented by ARD, Inc. Social Infrastructure Projects, with heavy local planning and implementation, brought desperately-needed improvements to Afro-Colombian communities. Institutional Strengthening Projects trained and empowered Afro-Colombians to plan and govern their own affairs more effectively.

USAID/Colombia will continue to assist Afro-Colombians in targeted regions, and will continue to address the principal challenges of poverty, health, violence, displacement, illiteracy, and inadequate governance.